

Lesson 8: Judging and Condemnation

*Lesson Theme: Emphasis on when, how, and whether we should judge others.
Difference in tolerance and judgment*

Text: Matthew 7:1-12

Judging

¹ “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

³ “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴ How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

⁶ “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.

Ask, Seek, Knock

⁷ “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

⁹ “Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! ¹² So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

Introduction

Thus far in the sermon, Jesus has reminded his disciples of their need for salvation (Matthew 5:1-6) and prepared their hearts for his teaching (Matthew 5:7-18). In the middle part of the sermon, Jesus contrasts the common wisdom of the religious leaders of his day and calls his disciples to live lives that surpass the righteousness of the Pharisees (Matthew 5:19-37). Moving from the personal realm into the public realm, Jesus calls us to live in community – both among fellow disciples and among non-believers.

In this lesson, Jesus speaks to us as a community of believers and calls us to be a “supportive family where members are helping each other rise to higher degrees of righteousness, where relationships with God are being renewed and where unbelievers are being drawn to Christ” (Stott, p. 41).

Matthew 7:1-6

In Matthew 6, Jesus describes how we should do our good deeds, our prayer, our fasting – all the practices we do to better understand the character of God and His will for us – in private. So it makes perfect sense later in the sermon on the mount that Jesus tells us not to judge others by how things appear to us.

He talks about three interrelated ideas here, and we miss his point when we peel them off in isolation:

- The way you judge others will be the same way you are judged.
- Watch out for hypocrisy.
- And, as the KJV puts it, “neither cast ye your pearls before swine.”

The first part is oft-quoted in modern days. We know some people latch on to “do not judge” and treat it as a command to simply ignore or justify sin. But we also know that's just not the case. Jesus spent His entire ministry traveling the region explaining the dire need we all have for God's forgiveness and insisting that God had given Him the power to provide it (and doing so generously). So it's no surprise we are all “subject to judgment,” as Jesus put it earlier in His sermon. And none of us can call out others as though we are sinless. At the same time, that doesn't mean we celebrate sin to avoid judging or that we simply give in to sin “so that grace may abound.” No, we speak truth about God's will, as explained in scripture and evident in nature, and leave the ultimate application of the righteousness and grace of God to God.

Now, there are times when we are called to confront a brother or a sister about his or her sin, even though we are never sinless ourselves. That's an entirely biblical concept. But Jesus here says save those “pearls” – that sacred instruction – for those with whom you are most intimate. Our spiritual wisdom can't be spewed to random passers by. Spiritual confrontation cannot take place on a protest placard or in a Facebook post. It has to be between fellow believers who understand that each are committed to living out the will of Jesus. And it certainly has to be between those inside the church.

But there's also a point to be made that the witness of the church, her holiness and her obedience to Christ, serve to call out the sin and corruption of the world. But just as Jesus did not come into the world to condemn it, we have a role in helping to redeem it.

Eventually, we will all be judged by the ultimate authority in the universe. But that judgment comes with a caveat that is the blood of Jesus Christ. On that day, God will look at those of us whose sins have been covered by that blood and will see only the

righteousness of Jesus, not our own depraved hearts and sinful lives.

Discussion Questions

- Read the passage carefully. What specific commands does Jesus give?
- What's Jesus' rationale for telling listeners not to judge others?
- How would you reconcile Paul's point to the Corinthians, "What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside." 1 Cor. 5 and how do we reconcile that with James, who writes, "Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?" James 4:11-12?
- In what ways are these verses a logical response to our awareness of our need for salvation (5:3-4)? How do these verses expand on Jesus' statement about the merciful (5:7)?
- Why are we unfit to be judges?
- Do the passages on judging refer to individual judging or communal acts of judgment? Do they include judges in courts of law?
- Who are the "dogs" and "pigs" Jesus' refers to? Why is it useless to talk with such people?
- How is the church seen by those outside? How can the church not be seen as judgemental in a way that it can be effective?

Resources

John Stott writes: "The simple but vital point that Jesus is making in these verses is that we are not God. No human being is qualified to be the judge of others, for we cannot read each other's hearts or assess each other's motives. Not only are we not the judge, but we are among the judged and shall be judged with greater strictness ourselves if we dare to judge others" (pp. 74-75).

John Stott writes: "The picture of somebody struggling with the delicate operation of removing a speck of dirt from a friend's eye while a vast plank in his own eye entirely obscures his vision is ludicrous. Yet when the caricature is transferred to ourselves and our ridiculous fault finding, we do not always appreciate the joke. We have a fatal tendency to exaggerate the faults of others and minimize the gravity of our own" (p. 75).

Matthew 7:7-12

We too often envision God as begrudging judge, reluctantly and meagerly apportioning His grace and goodness upon humanity and us individually in a zero-sum way. So wrong, Jesus says. Instead, He is a loving father who longs for closeness with His children and who desires to pour out infinite blessings upon us.

We who are parents may think the love we have for our children is as deep as the ocean, but Jesus says it's a muddy puddle compared to the love God has for all of us. We may think our expressions of love are generous and self-sacrificial, but God's love and his blessings are based on absolute knowledge, absolute truth and absolute love. It's never more reassuring to be called "evil" than when Jesus does it here.

God wants to bless us. But He doesn't just want to be a bottomless Amazon wish list. He wants us to want for ourselves what He wants for us. And that's one of the primary goals of scripture – to inform us about what He wants for us – holiness. This is where we should diverge from the "prosperity gospel," which teaches that God is a vehicle to unlocking wealth and power. Not true. Yes, God wants to bless us. But it's not about comfort or safety or long life or money or cars or houses. It's not about "your best life now," it's about seeking first His kingdom and trusting Him to look after our other needs

Second, as James writes, "every good and perfect gift" comes from God. Think about that. Everything that has made you joyful or happy, anything that has made you laugh or smile – that's a direct gift from God.

Discussion Questions

- What assurance do we receive from these verses?
- What kinds of things should we ask for? Physical needs? Spiritual needs?
- How are verses 7-12 related to verses 1-6?

Conclusion

To a certain extent, our tendency to criticize others comes from our awareness that others with obvious sin in their lives have more material blessings or better jobs or more talents while we work hard to follow God's teachings and yet have less. Or we tend to judge people's spiritual lives by the evidence of blessings God bestows on them. These verses continue the theme laid in the beatitudes (5:3-12) to focus on our own need for redemption in preparation for God's teachings. If we can learn to see the world we live in from the spiritual worldview that Jesus presents in the Sermon on the Mount instead of the limited physical worldview of the world we live in, we will be far less likely to criticize and much more likely to encourage others in our community of believers.

For Additional Reading

Stott, John. *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1985.